

"Keyword Warrants" - Feds Secretly Ordered Google To Identify Anyone Searching Certain Information - Activist Post

4-6 minutes : 10/6/2021



By [Tyler Durden](#)

An **accidentally unsealed** court document reveals that **the federal government secretly ordered Google to provide data on people searching specific search words or phrases, otherwise known as “keyword warrants,”** according to [Forbes](#).

According to the report, the Justice Department inadvertently unsealed the documents in September (which were promptly re-sealed), which were reviewed by *Forbes*. In several instances, law enforcement investigators **asked Google to identify anyone searching for specific keywords.**

The first case was in 2019 when federal investigators were on the hunt for men they believed sex-trafficked a minor. According

to a search warrant, the minor went missing but reappeared a year later and claimed to have been kidnapped and sexually assaulted. Investigators asked Google if anyone had searched the minor's name. The tech giant responded **and provided law enforcement agents with Google accounts and IP addresses of those who made the searches.**

There have been other rare examples of so-called keyword warrants, such as in 2020 when police asked Google if anyone searched for the address of an arson victim in the government's racketeering case against singer R Kelly. Then in 2017, a Minnesota judge requested Google to provide information on anyone who searched for a fraud victim's name.

Forbes also added this update post-publication:

*After publication, Jennifer Lynch, surveillance litigation director at the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), highlighted **three other Google keyword warrants** that were used in the investigation into serial Austin bombings in 2018, which resulted in the deaths of two people.*

*Not widely discussed at the time, the orders appear even broader than the one above, **asking for IP addresses and Google account information of individuals who searched for various addresses and some terms associated with bomb making, such as “low explosives” and “pipe bomb.”** Similar orders were served on Microsoft and Yahoo for their respective search engines.*

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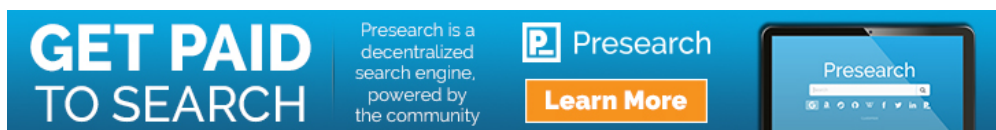
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As for what data the tech companies gave to investigators, that information remains under seal.


You can read the orders on Google [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#). The Microsoft and Yahoo orders can be found [here](#) and [here](#).



Every year, Google responds to thousands of warrant orders, but the latest keyword warrant is an entirely new strategy by government investigators and is becoming increasingly controversial.

“Trawling through Google’s search history database enables police to identify people merely based on what they might have been thinking about, for whatever reason, at some point in the past,” Jennifer Granick, surveillance and cybersecurity counsel at the American Civil Liberties Union, told Forbes. **“This never-before-possible technique threatens First Amendment interests and will inevitably sweep up innocent people, especially if the keyword terms are not unique and the time frame not precise. To make matters worse, police are currently doing this in secret, which insulates the practice from public debate and regulation,”** she added.

Google responded news about secret keyword warrants and defended its decision:



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“As with all law enforcement requests, we have a rigorous process that is designed to protect the privacy of our users while supporting the important work of law enforcement,” a Google spokesperson said.

Court records reviewed by Forbes show Google has given away data on people who searched for specific keywords, which is more evidence the [US is transforming into an authoritarian state of monitoring and surveillance of online activities](#) just like China's.

Source: [ZeroHedge](#)

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